

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY LAUDS REINSTATEMENT OF FIRE GRANT PROGRAM, URGES BUSH TO REQUEST FULL FUNDING

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today commended President Bush for reconsidering his decision to eliminate a new grant program designed to assist fire departments. But he expressed disappointment that the president will only request a third of the funding that Congress authorized for the program in Fiscal Year 2002.

"I am happy to see that the president has recognized that this is an important program," said Hinchey. "But there is no reason why it should not be fully funded. We're talking about reducing injury and loss of life for a relatively modest cost. President Bush needs to make the program a higher priority."

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program was created by the 106th Congress and authorized for \$400 million over two years. Congress appropriated \$100 million for the fire grant program in FY '01. But the Bush Administration's initial FY '02 budget request did not include any funding for the program. Hinchey and several of his colleagues wrote to the president on March 5, urging him to reconsider that decision and to request the remaining \$300 million that had been authorized. At a meeting with leaders of the major fire service organizations earlier this week, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Joe Allbaugh announced that the Administration's 2002 budget request would now include \$100 million to continue the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program for a second year.

Fire departments interested in applying for grants should call the toll free information line at 866-274-0960 or visit the FEMA website www.usfa.fema.gov/grants. Assistance is available in six categories: training, wellness/fitness, vehicles, firefighting equipment, personal protective equipment, and fire prevention programs. FEMA will begin accepting applications on April 2.